

**Annual
Corporate
Evaluation
Report**

1998

Evaluation Unit

Corporate Services Branch International Development Research Centre

Introduction

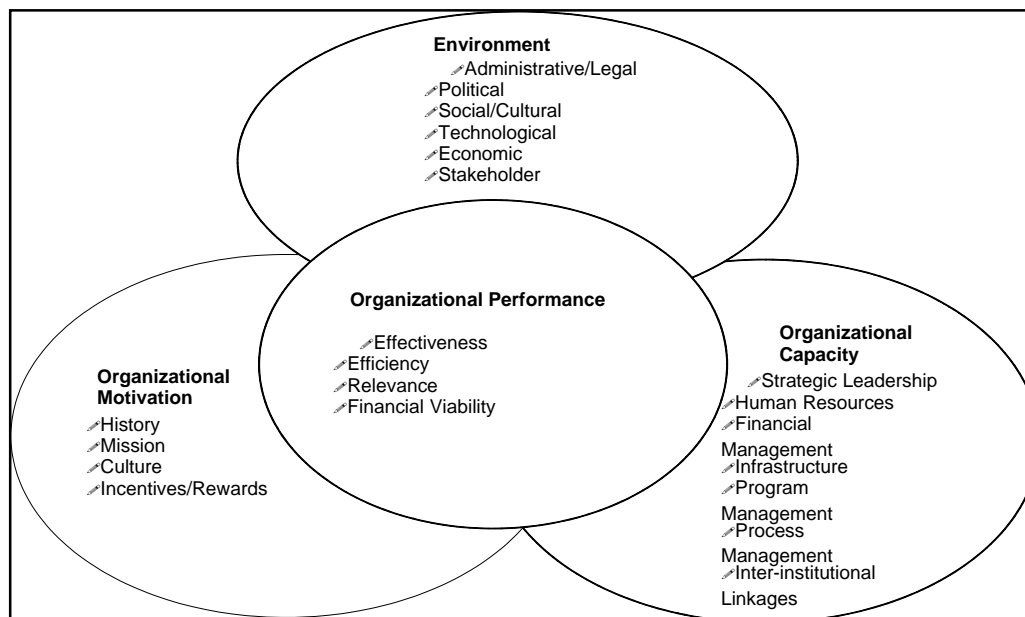
To date, the Annual Corporate Evaluation (ACE) Report has provided an overview of evaluation activities at IDRC: by reviewing the Centre's progress in measuring program performance; by highlighting new evaluation tools and systems; and, by summarizing findings from recent evaluation reports. Next year, the ACE Report will focus on the results of IDRC-supported research by reporting on a number of development impact case studies and synthesis papers. This year, however, the format is different. To visually introduce some of the conceptual issues relating to impact, the ACE Report consists of this document and a twelve minute video entitled, *Navrongo: Behind the Face of Impact*. It highlights the factors that contributed to the Navrongo Health Research Centre's (NHRC) rapid evolution into a world-class health research institution since its founding ten years ago. IDRC contributed to the NHRC's development by providing financial and technical support, new information technologies, and access to international scientific networks. While IDRC funding to the NHRC between 1991 and 1996 was relatively small, the support was timely and strategic, enabling it to have disproportionately important effects. This document presents a framework through which the lessons of the Navrongo case can be understood and applied to other situations.

Organizational Assessment Framework

In 1995, IDRC's Evaluation Unit published, *Institutional Assessment: A Framework for Strengthening Organizational Capacity for IDRC's Research Partners*. Initially, the framework was intended to be used for evaluating the effectiveness of donor support to research institutions. The Evaluation Unit found that it could be applied more broadly and has successfully employed it in a number of different evaluations related to organizations and programs. The framework has three purposes: first, it serves as a diagnostic tool to help design the elements necessary for a successful development initiative; second, during an initiative, it can be used to monitor and improve

performance; and third, it provides the elements required to assess and account for the results.

In the following diagram of the organizational assessment framework, performance is defined in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, ongoing relevance (the extent to which the institution adapts to changing conditions in its environment), and financial viability. The framework assumes that certain forces drive performance. These include the **capacities** of the institution -- human resource, technological, financial and organizational; the external **environment** in which it operates -- legal, political, social, and economic; and, its internal **motivation**. These factors affect both how the organization does its work and the work it does.



1: A Framework for Assessing Organizational Performance

Source: *Using Assessment to Improve Performance: A Guide to Organizational Self-Assessment*. Charles Lusthaus et al. Ottawa: IDRC, 1998 (Draft).

The Navrongo Health Research Centre

In a short time, the NHRC has achieved extraordinary results. This facility in remote northern Ghana has emerged as a leader in African epidemiological research; a forerunner in applying new computer technologies; and, a world-class institution involved in conducting two of Africa's largest health research projects. It has become a demonstration centre for researchers in Africa and Asia. Its impact at the local, national, and international levels has enabled it to attract support from various international donor agencies, as well as the Ghanaian government, thereby ensuring its future sustainability.

as an African health research centre. How was the NHRC able to achieve this? The answer, while not simple, illustrates vividly the complex dynamics of development research impact. A myriad of factors contributed to the NHRC's success. The purpose of documenting these factors, however, is not to show how to recreate the same events elsewhere. That would be impossible. Rather, the Navrongo case illustrates that there are a host of issues that should be monitored and acted upon when trying to achieve development impact. This "check-list" is intended to help IDRC staff and management conceptualise the issues that can influence the performance of development research organizations. Although each of the factors that influenced the success of the NHRC is discussed separately, they should not be considered in isolation. They are synergistic factors that have interacted with, and reinforced, one another. Within the organizational assessment framework, examples of the factors that contributed to the success of the NHRC and the results of the initiatives are presented below.

External Environment

Political

The Ghanaian government is committed to the NHRC and has given it special powers for foreign currency exchange. Although it retains its autonomy, the NHRC was declared a district health research unit linked to the Ministry of Health in 1992.

Result: The NHRC strengthens health research and the health delivery system in Ghana. It stimulates public awareness, informs government policy, and sets standards which the Ministry of Health implements in other districts.

Social/Cultural

The NHRC is closely linked to the communities in which it works. It adapts its research methodologies and health delivery strategies to the cultural context in which it operates in order to yield the greatest results. The NHRC's Director, Dr. Fred Binka, spent two weeks visiting local elders in order to persuade them to support and participate in the Vitamin A and malaria bednet trials.

Result: The researchers at the NHRC gain the trust of the communities around them. In return for their cooperation, the health

of the communities' children improves and the research results help children in other communities.

Stakeholders

The NHRC enjoys the full support of its stakeholders -- international donors, health officials, and villagers.

Result: The NHRC employs community volunteers to act as front line health assessors in remote communities. It also uses the *Durbar*, a traditional village meeting, so local people can speak about their health care problems. The resulting high-quality research draws scientific interest and support from other countries and international donors.

Organizational Motivation

History

The NHRC gradually builds its reputation and effectiveness by adapting research tools from all over the world to the health concerns of the surrounding population. Growing capacity for high-quality research and training emerges.

Result: The NHRC reverses brain drain by locating and keeping African scientists working in the region; it develops world-wide linkages; and, it becomes a well-known, permanent fixture in the area. Employees of the NHRC are building their lives, professionally and personally, in this region of northern Ghana.

Mission

NHRC's mandate is to conduct applied health research. It is committed to increasing awareness about health development problems, changing risk behaviour through education, and finding inexpensive solutions to common health concerns.

Result: Due to its success in realizing its mission, other institutions in Africa and Asia use it as a model for capacity building and seek its guidance in research projects. NHRC focuses national attention on health issues through the media and appearances before government agencies and communities.

Culture

The NHRC operates on the principle that high-quality, local health research, carried out with an understanding of cultural norms and values, can vastly improve the quality and delivery of health care in the region.

Result: The effects of the NHRC's work on the health of the surrounding communities is well documented and widely recognized. The regular administration of the Vitamin A supplement reduces total child mortality, mostly from measles and diarrhea, by 23%. The Malaria Bednet Trials result in a 17% reduction in child mortality and a 40% reduction in hospital admissions due to malaria.

Incentives

The non-monetary rewards that drive the employees of the NHRC are: the opportunity for African scientists to work on world-class research in Africa; having access to the global research community; and, the possibility to help their own people.

Result: The NHRC has repatriated eight West African medical researchers from abroad; there is low staff turnover; and, there is a strong rapport between the researchers and local villagers.

Organizational Capacity

Strategic

Dr. Fred Binka, a Ghanaian physician and researcher, has shown:

Leadership

unwavering dedication to the NHRC since becoming its full-time director in 1992; an ability to negotiate concessions from the Ghanaian government; and, skilled leadership in teaching and motivating staff.

Result: Dr. Binka's leadership has fuelled the development and growth of the NHRC. Stakeholders have great confidence and trust in his ability to manage the health research facility and the

NHRC is seen as a valuable resource by the national government.

Human

The scientists and researchers working at the NHRC are trained

Resources

specialists who are highly dedicated to their work. There are also a number of volunteers who work closely with the outlying towns and villages to promote health education.

Result: The NHRC provides opportunities for the professional development of its employees on new technologies and methodological approaches. Young African researchers use the NHRC as a training centre and they receive guidance from the more senior scientists. Their involvement with the NHRC holds the promise of international recognition.

Technology

The introduction of new information technologies, such as the Geographic Information System (GIS) and a satellite connection to HealthNet, enable the NHRC to conduct high-quality health research.

Result: The NHRC has an e-mail and Internet account which provides researchers access to world-wide bibliographic materials, electronic networks, international experts, and other virtual research fora. Although geographically removed, the staff of the NHRC are able to actively participate in the international research community.

**Financial
Resources**

The effectiveness of the NHRC in conducting research has attracted the attention of a number of international donor organizations and support from the national government.

Result: Since British ODA's initial project and IDRC's catalytic support, donor agencies such as USAID, WHO, Finnida, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Population Council, and, most recently, the Bill Gates Foundation have supported the NHRC, believing it to be an exemplary case of using local skills to solve

local and continental problems.

Inter-	The NHRC has made professional contacts and research linkages with
Institutional	Northern and Southern research networks, universities, international
Linkages	health agencies, the national government, and regional health practitioners.

Result: The NHRC's reputation as a world-class health research centre has spread rapidly and its research results influence the health programs of development agencies and the Ghanaian Ministry of Health. It has become a training centre for other health research institutes in Tanzania, Mali, Kenya, and Bangladesh.

Conclusion

The successful development of the Navrongo Health Research Centre provides an ideal case study of impact because it illustrates many of the factors that have to converge in order to achieve sustainable development impact. The factors affecting sustainability exist at local, national, regional, and international levels. As you watch the video, does the organizational assessment framework help you note and keep track of the enabling factors? Do its components -- motivation, environment, and capacity -- help assemble the pieces of the "impact puzzle"? Is the framework useful for Centre staff and management as a check-list of the necessary elements to support, monitor, and evaluate effective development research initiatives?